Combating major communicable diseases: accelerated action within the context of poverty reduction

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The European Commission issued a report on the progress made in the last 2 years in the implementation of its Programme for Action on HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis which was adopted in February 2001. The report concludes that two years after its inception the Programme for Action remains a comprehensive, forward-looking and coherent EU policy framework making a significant contribution towards improved country, regional and global action against the three major communicable diseases. The PfA is strongly supported by Council and Parliament, as well as by civil society and the private sector. The Programme for Action entailed a series of actions to increase the impact of existing interventions, increase the affordability of key pharmaceuticals and encourage research in and development of specific global public goods to tackle these diseases at the national, regional and global level. - Impact of existing Actions : with regard to increasing impact, progress has been limited. The number of peoples affected, infected and dying from HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB is still on the increase. Few have access to effective TB and malaria interventions and anti-retroviral medicines. Despite international consensus on the urgent need to tackle these diseases, there remains a lack of large-scale collective action both at national and global level. With this Action Programme, the Commission has, however, together with all partners engaged in this fight, drawn more attention to these diseases and the need to work in a co-ordinated way towards the same objectives. The EU approach is based on the need to match all ongoing international efforts in health, education, as well as trade and research. Emphasis will remain on increasing spending on social structures, as a key determinant for the effectiveness of these efforts. - Affordability and Trade : the progress report shows that the Commission's strategy towards tiered (that is reduced) pricing as a norm for poor countries has gained broad support and is applied by some manufacturers in their sales to developing countries. The Commission has also delivered in terms of increasing protection against importation of tiered priced medicines into the EU by proposing a regulation to this effect. Tariffs and fees in the importing countries have been identified as serious obstacles to making medicines more affordable and should therefore be eliminated. The EU will work towards such elimination. In the World Trade Organisation (WTO), during the lengthy negotiations leading to the Doha Declaration on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights, the EU fought to ensure that intellectual property protection is supportive of public health. The problems faced by WTO Members with insufficient or no manufacturing capacities in the pharmaceutical sector at large in making effective use of compulsory licensing remain unsolved. The EU continues to be fully engaged in finding a long lasting, multilateral solution to this problem as soon as possible. - Research and Development : in research, the Commission has been able to deliver a step change in the amount of funds allocated by the EU and in the way these are used. For the first time, Europe will be able to speak and act at world level with one voice on research. Significantly increased resources have beenallocated to basic, pre-clinical and clinical research in HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB from the 6th Framework Programmes for Research. EU Member States, developing countries and other donors are joining efforts, on the ground in the developing countries, in an integrated European programme for research against the three poverty diseases. The Commission will invest EUR 200 million in this initiative, the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Programme (EDCPT). On top of that, the Commission will invest another EUR 200 million in more basic research. The EDCTP initiative constitutes a new step forward as it will strengthen and unify European and African research efforts in the fight against the three diseases. Moreover, it fully involves developing countries scientists and public authorities. The EDTCP is a unique opportunity to create a long-term, sustainable and genuine partnership between the EU and developing countries, which is essential to accelerate the development of new products to confront the three major communicable diseases. Globally, the EU has been proactive in addressing the issues covered by the Action Programme for example, in the context of the G8, in

particular at Okinawa, at EU/US summits, the EU/AU forum. The Commission is an active Board Member of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) and will contribute EUR 120 million in 2002. The progress report concludes that the Action Programme has demonstrated that a strong EU voice is crucial, and, as a result of the Programme, EU positions on targeted HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB actions have been significantly strengthened on a global level jointly with other partners. Nevertheless, more efforts are needed to provide regular and structured dialogue with developing countries. Renewed efforts are also needed to work jointly at the European level as well as with specific partners on all the issues stated in the Programme.